

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 IO-10 ISO-00 L-02 DPW-01 SCA-01 AID-05 SR-02

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FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3292

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0371

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SWEL, AORG, ICRC, ET

SUBJ: RELIEF OPERATIONS IN ERITREA

REF: A) ADDIS 2960; B) ADDIS 3007; C) ADDIS 3340

1. ON 27 MARCH CONS OFF DISCUSSED RELIEF OPERATIONS WITH FIT. DEMISIE BANJAW, ACTING MAYOR, AND CHAIRMAN OF ASMARA BRANCH OF ERC. FIT DEMISIE BELIEVES THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE A NEED FOR RELIEF SUPPLIES, BUT THAT THE GREATEST PROBLEM NOW IS THE TRANSPORTATION OF SUPPLIES FROM MASSAWA AND THE DISTRIBUTION TO THE NEEDY IN AND AROUND ASMARA. HE REPORTED THAT OF THE 230 TONS OF ICRC SUPPLIES IN MASSAWA, ONE LORRY HAS REACHED ASMARA, AND ANOTHER IS EXPECTED TODAY OR TOMORROW. THE ARMY INSISTS THE TRUCKS BE ESCORTED BY TROOPS, BUT THE ESCORT IS NOT ALWAYS AVAILABLE. THE TRUCK ENROUTE WAS STOPPED BY ELEMENTS OF POLICE AND ARMY, WHO QUESTIONED THE TRANSPORT PERMIT. TWELVE LORRIES OF COMMERCIAL GRAIN RECENTLY ARRIVED IN ASMARA FROM THE SOUTH. THIS SUPPLY ROUTE ALSO HINDERED BY ESCORT REQUIREMENT. FIT. DEMISIE SAID BG GETACHEW NADOW, ERITREAN CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR, CONFIDENTIAL

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IS RELUCTANT TO RELEASE RELIEF STOCKS ON HAND, DUE TO BELIEF THEY

WILL FALL INTO THE HANDS OF THE ELF/PLF. THE ARMY, WHICH CONTROLS DISTRIBUTION OF ALL RED CROSS AND RELIEF SUPPLIES, HAS RELEASED SOME RELIEF GRAIN AND FLOUR. ONE OTHER SOURCE SAID VILLAGERS THREW THE FLOUR AWAY, BECAUSE THEY FEARED THE ARMY HAD POISONED IT.

2. WHEN ASKED WHAT CON GEN COULD DO TO ASSIST RELIEF EFFORT, FIT. DEMISIE REPLIED THAT WE SHOULD TRY TO CONVINCE BG GETACHEW TO DISTRIBUTE THE SUPPLIES ON HAND. COMMENT: CONGEN CAN APPROACH BG GETACHEW ON THE PROBLEM LOCALLY, BUT SIMILAR URGING PROBABLY REQUIRED AT EMBASSY LEVEL.

3. ONE OTHER REASON FOR INEFFECTIVENESS OF ASMARA ERC IS DISPUTE WITH MILITARY AUTHORITIES OVER ESTABLISHMENT OF NEUTRAL ZONES, E.G. HOSPITAL COMPOUNDS, CHURCHES, ETC., IN WHICH RED CROSS CAN OPERATE. ERITREAN MEMBERS OF ASMARA ERC DEMAND NEUTRAL ZONES AS A PRECONDITION TO THEIR COOPERATION IN RELIEF EFFORT. MILITARY AUTHORITIES HAVE REFUSED TO OK ESTABLISHMENT OF NEUTRAL ZONES. IT IS LIKELY THAT EXPLUSION OF REFUGEES FROM CAMPS AND CHURCHES WAS MADE TO ELIMINATE DEFACTO NEUTRAL AREAS, RATHER THAN AS A LACK OF NEED FOR CONTINUED SERVICES.
SHERRY

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